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A newsletter of Nature Kenya-The EANHS August 2022

A section of Yala Swamp. PHOTO: JOHN MWACHARO

Yala Swamp communities need your support to protect their precious wetland

Nature Kenya has learned that the National Land Commission (NLC) plans to push ahead with the controversial allocation of 6,763.74 ha of Yala Swamp to Lake Agro Ltd despite sustained objections from communities and other stakeholders.

The intended move by NLC grossly violates the rights and betrays the trust of indigenous Yala communities - the rightful custodians of the communal land, compromises the communities' livelihoods and threatens the wetland's unique biodiversity.

In their Yala Swamp Determination paper 74, NLC says that the Siaya County Government applied to allocate the parcels of land to Lake Agro Ltd with a contested Part Development Plan and Survey Plans. The commission acknowledges that public participation concerns were raised during the planning process.

As part of its determination on the matter, NLC instructs the Siaya County Government to submit to it, within two weeks, detailed evidence of multi-stakeholder, inclusive and meaningful public participation in the planning process. It is well known to NLC that the surveys done by the Siaya County Government on the parcels allocated to Lake Agro Ltd were dubiously conducted, with little input from the communities. As such, any request for evidence of the same by NLC equates to insincerity, trivialisation of the issue, and betrayal of trust bestowed on them by the communities.

A land-use plan for Yala Swamp is in place. The Yala Delta Land Use Plan (LUP) was developed collaboratively by Yala Swamp stakeholders and the Siaya and Busia counties governments. Both governors from the two counties endorsed the plan. The Busia County Assembly went further and adopted the LUP as a policy. Yala communities recognize the LUP as a negotiated framework that guides the sustainable use of resources within the wetland and surrounding areas. Yala communities wonder why the allocation in the PDP varies significantly with the LUP recommendations.

During the public hearings conducted by NLC, 21 entities, including community, civic and governmental organizations, presented strong objections to the proposed allocation. Their grounds for objections were rooted in human rights violations, threats to community livelihoods, habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity, as captured in NLC's paper. But, the NLC, has ignored all the objections. Who is NLC representing? The people or the developer?

Kenyans expect NLC to make a decision that respects the constitutional ownership rights of the communities in Yala, recognizes the ecological value of Yala Swamp, and promotes the preservation of the wetland for prosperity. Anything short of these minimal expectations is unacceptable and must be rejected.

What you can do to support the people of Yala Swamp

We urge members to stand with the Yala Swamp communities in objecting the planned allocation of the wetland to a private developer. You can support by:

1. **Signing our petition here: https://bit.ly/3beRngg or;**
2. **Submitting objection letters to the Chairman of the National Land Commission (info@landcommission.go.ke), Cabinet Secretary Lands (P.O. Box 30450 – 00100 Nairobi or info@ardhi.go.ke), Cabinet Secretary Environment (P.O. Box 30126 – 00100 Nairobi or cs@environment.go.ke) and copy to the Siaya County Government (P.O. Box 803 – 40600 Siaya or clerk@siayaassembly.go.ke or info@siaya.go.ke).**

Land purchase in Dakatcha Woodland

By Edwin Utumbi

Some years back, you had to plan adequately before visiting Dakatcha Woodland. Marafa was the main local town for people planning to visit the woodland. A few scheduled buses and matatus ferried passengers to Malindi early in the mornings and returned in the afternoon. One was required to seek banking and other services in Malindi.

Since then, things have changed. Some areas in the woodland have piped water and electricity. Travel to Malindi is no longer an issue, thanks to a tarmacked road that leads up to Wakala. The road has attracted many small vehicles ferrying passengers to and from Malindi anytime.

Development, in the form of piped water, electricity and extended road networks, has opened up the woodland to the outside world, attracting people eager to acquire large tracts of land. Money is quickly changing hands. The former community-owned forests are fast disappearing due to the aggressive land sales and unplanned land use changes.

The serene and biodiversity-rich Dakatcha Woodland Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) now faces life-changing threats. Access roads, farms and settlements have made inroads deep into the woodland. Illegal activities like charcoal burning and poaching have also intensified due to this exposure.

Escalating uncontrolled land use changes and the transition of land tenure from communal to private ownership has prompted conservationists to take action to save the woodland's unique species. Nature Kenya has closely monitored the trends of the Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver in Dakatcha. The threatened Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver only lives in Kilifi County and nests in seasonal wetlands found in Dakatcha.

To secure a home for the Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver, Nature Kenya has acquired 2,573 acres of the woodland through a land purchase program with financial support from the World Land Trust, African Bird Club, RESOLVE and TiME.

Contd. in pg. 2

Land purchase in Dakatcha Woodland *contd.*

Areas identified for purchase have been mapped out and deemed suitable for conservation of the Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver.

The Kamale Nature Reserve is one such area. The forest block, measuring 1,800 acres, has four seasonal wetlands. Kilifi (Clarke's) weavers have been recorded breeding in one of the wetlands within the reserve. Apart from bird life, the Kamale also hosts mammals such as Golden-rumped Sengis, duikers and buffaloes. Lions and elephants occasionally visit the Kamale Nature Reserve at different times.

With shrinking forest cover, Kamale Nature Reserve is expected to offer shelter to many wildlife. Local communities manage the reserve through the Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group and the Kamale Mazingira Community-based Organization (CBO).

Mapping of land for a Nature Reserve in Dakatcha Woodland. PHOTO: EDWIN UTUMBI

A community warden has been engaged through the SSG who plans and executes forest patrols and biodiversity monitoring visits.

Nature Kenya, working in collaboration with the local conservation groups, plans to conduct monitoring activities periodically to ascertain the biodiversity status of the reserve.

This year Nature Kenya finalized purchase of another 773 acres of forest at Kibaoni – Marafa. In the long run this forest block can form part of a rich birding ecosystem in an urban set up. The forest is rich in birds and periodically hosts the Kilifi (Clarke's) weavers after breeding in the nearby Bore – Mnyenzeni wetland.

Through the land purchase approach, Nature Kenya seeks to secure core conservation zones in Dakatcha Woodland to protect and conserve endemic and threatened bird and mammal species. Land purchase for conservation is a strategy worth exploring in high priority conservation areas with no formal protection status.

The Herpetofauna of Ondiri Swamp; Filling the Gap...

By Beryl Bwong and Thomas Odeyo

Peter's Reed Frog. PHOTO: THOMAS ODEYO

Ondiri Swamp is an important wetland found close to Kikuyu town in Kiambu County. The swamp is bordered in all sides by extensive cultivation of a variety of crops. Such activities if not kept in control may threaten the lives of the swamps inhabitants. Many amphibians and some reptiles use wetlands like Ondiri swamp for their survival. Unfortunately, not much is known about amphibians and reptiles Ondiri Swamp. Opportunistic records mainly from ornithologists indicate that two endemic amphibians occur in Ondiri, these include the Bladder Reed frog (*Hyperolius cystocandicans*) also listed as vulnerable (V) in the IUCN Red List of threatened species and Kinangop Puddle frog (*Phrynobatrachus kinangopensis*). In light of all the threat facing this swamp it is important to document its biodiversity and so as to inform management decisions.

Nile Ridged Frog. PHOTO: THOMAS ODEYO

The Kenya Herpetofauna Working group visited Ondiri Swamp on 13th May 2022 in response to an invitation by the Ondiri Swamp management. The survey team of 15 participants also included four members of the friends of Ondiri Swamp. The day was bright and sunny signaling a great day a head. The team spilt into three groups for effective coverage of the swamp. While one group was wading through the middle of the wetland, the other two were walking along the edges of the. The survey went on from around 9:30 am to 1:30 pm when the group took a break as the sun was getting hotter and hence spotting the amphibians and reptiles became difficult. A few members of the team remained behind to conduct night sampling. The survey methods involved visual encounter surveys and hand-netting. A total of 16 hours of effort was expended at the site.

By the end of it all five species were recorded, comprising of three amphibians and two reptiles. Amphibian species include, the Nile Ridged Frog (*Ptychadena nilotica*) which was the most commonly observed species during the day; Peter's Reed frog (*Hyperolius glandicolor*) and Marsabit Clawed frog (*Xenopus borealis*). The reptiles include, Von Höhnels Chameleon (*Trioceros hoehnelli*) which was found perched on Typha ssp and Stripped skink (*Trachylepis striata*) which was spotted basking on a tree at the edge of the swamp. At night the swamp came to life with loud calls of the reed frog as well as the Nile Ridged Frog. However, the team did not record both the Silver Bladder Reed frog and the Kinangop Puddle frog.

Von Höhnels Chameleon. PHOTO: THOMAS ODEYO

Why we should listen and care for Amphibian calls

The presence of these species in Ondiri swamp is significant as it is an indicator of a healthy wetland ecosystem. The calls of amphibians are some of the most beautiful, but sadly also some of the most threatened, sounds in the natural world. Over half of the world's 6,000 amphibian species are now threatened with extinction, thousands are already lost. The primary cause of this decline is habitat loss and degradation, but a growing number of species are also being impacted by diseases, pollution, pesticides, and introduced predators. When amphibians disappear, it is not just their calls that are lost, but also the important ecological roles they play in both freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems.

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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MAKENYA (Mammal Atlas for Kenya) mobile app launch

Kenya has an extensive network of protected areas comprised of parks, reserves, forests, and private and community conservancies. These areas support one of the largest assemblages of wildlife in Africa. With more than 390 mammal species and 22 of these being endemic, Kenya is home to a third of all African mammals. Some of the iconic large mammal species found in Kenya include the African Savanna Elephant, giraffe, lion, and leopard. Notable mammal species found only in Kenya include the Golden-rumped Sengi, Tana River Mangabey and Tana River Red Colobus. Endemic sub-species include Mount Kenya Guereza, Mount Uarges Guereza and Mount Kenya Potto.

Mammal Atlas of Kenya (MAKENYA) mobile application is a project of the Mammal Committee of Nature Kenya and the National Museums of Kenya in collaboration with Spotteron (Austria), San Diego Natural History Museum (USA), Fitchburg State University (USA), Kenya Professionals Safari Guides Association (KPSGA), Kunming Institute (China), and Eastern Africa Primate Diversity and Conservation Program (Kenya). The MAKENYA app is for mapping rare and common mammals in Kenya. It is freely available online from the Google Play Store for use by Kenyans from all walks of life.

The MAKENYA app project aims to leverage the over 26 million Kenyans who own smartphones and the over 2 million tourists who visit the country annually to record mammal sightings throughout the country, in and outside protected areas. The app will collect crucial data on the abundance and distribution of mammal species in Kenya and ultimately contribute to their conservation and protection.

We are excited to welcome you all to the MAKENYA app launch on 24th August 2022 at the National Museums of Kenya, starting at 2.00 PM. This will be followed by a field excursion at Nairobi National Park and the Athi Kapiti plains to demonstrate how the app works.

August Evening (and Morning) Skies

By Fleur Ng'weno

Planets, Aug '22

The five planets that can be seen with the unaided eye are still visible in August 2022 – some in the evening, some all night, and others before dawn. Planets do not produce light; they reflect the light from the sun. Since they are much nearer to Earth, however, the nearest planets look brighter than the stars.

Golden Saturn rises in the east around sunset and travels across the sky with the stars, setting in the west around sunrise. (It's actually the Earth that rotates towards the east.) The bright, nearly full and full "supermoon" seems to be near Saturn on August 11 and 12.

Bright Jupiter rises during the evening and is in the west at dawn. Left (east) of Jupiter is Mars, glowing brighter and redder each night as its orbit brings it closer to earth. Mars rises around midnight and is high in the east, almost overhead, at dawn. The moon is near Jupiter on August 15 and 16, and near Mars on August 19 and 20.

Brilliant Venus is low in the eastern sky at sunrise, near the thin waning crescent moon on August 26. Bright little Mercury rises all month in the western sky above the sunset, passing the bright star Regulus the first week of August and reaching its highest point on the 27th. Look for the slender waxing crescent moon near Mercury on August 29.

August stars

The constellation of Scorpius, the scorpion, lies across the southern sky. Imagine the reddish star Antares as its fiery eye – or its heart. A curved line of stars forms the scorpion's tail, like a huge fishhook, with two stars as the sting.

To the west (right) are the bright stars Alpha and Beta Centauri. To the east (left) of the Scorpion's tail, stars form a shape like a teapot, or a basket with handles. The ancient Greeks saw this shape as part of the constellation Sagittarius, the Archer. The waxing gibbous moon is near Antares on August 7, and near the star Nunki in Sagittarius on the 9th.

In the northeast, the bright star Altair is flanked by two other stars, less bright. The star Vega, very bright, is low in the north. The orange star Arcturus is high in the northwest; and the blue-white star Spica is high in the west, near the moon on August 3 and 31. The constellation of the Plough or Big Dipper, with stars forming a long-handled spoon, is low in the northwest.

Aug '22 moon

First quarter (half-lit moon at sunset), Aug 5. Full moon, Aug 12 – a "supermoon", a little closer and brighter than usual. Last quarter (half-lit at dawn), Aug 19. New moon, Aug 27

Perseids meteors

Meteors are bright streaks of light formed by rocks and dust from space burning up in the Earth's atmosphere. The Perseids meteor shower runs from mid-July to late August, at its best on the night of August 12 to 13. Best viewing after midnight from a dark location with few or no clouds; the full moon may make viewing difficult this year.

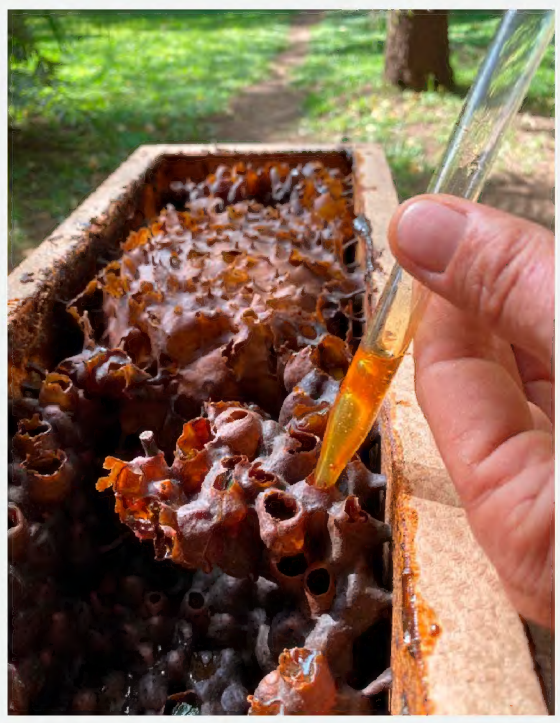
Honey from Stingless Bees: Medicinal Gold

By Kathrin Krausa and Matilda Gikonyo

Stingless bees are social; they form a colony that persists for several years. In good and bad times, bees work together for the sake of their colony. To prepare for bad times, like when floral resources are limited, they store food in pots small as a peanut or big as a macadamia nut, depending on the species. Honey is stored inside these well-sealed pots. And this is where the magic happens: fermentation. Stingless bee honey has a relatively high-water content of around 25%. This leads to natural fermentation and adds some acidity to the sweetness.

Thanks to the sustainable management of stingless bees, we can benefit from the bees' liquid gold. In East Africa, stingless beekeeping, the so-called meliponiculture, is performed predominantly in Western Kenya and Northern Tanzania. Local communities appreciate stingless bee honey and keep colonies as first aid boxes next to their houses.

Compared to honeybees, stingless bees produce way less honey. Only about one litre can be harvested per colony in a year. And yet, stingless beekeeping is becoming popular as more people appreciate the medicinal properties of the honey. It has a low glycaemic index with anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antibiotic properties. Therefore, stingless bee honey is an immune booster rather than a simple sweetener. One may say: a teaspoon a day keeps the doctor away.



Stingless bee honey. PHOTO: KATHRIN KRAUSA

BIRDING **UPDATES**

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi
Please observe Covid-19 protocols as needed: wear or bring masks and meet at designated venues.

3rd August – Manguo Pond, Limuru. Meet at 8.30 am at Manguo Pond. Directions: Coming from the City Centre, take Nairobi – Nakuru Highway. Turn right a few metres after Limuru Bridge into the wetland.

10th August – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

17th August – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

24th August – Nairobi Arboretum. Meet at 8:30 am at the main entrance off State House Road. There is an entrance fee of Ksh. 65 per person payable via Mpesa.

31st August – City Park. Meet at 8.30 am at the parking near the Coca Cola Kiosk. Directons: Coming from the City centre, take Limuru Road past Aga Khan Hospital. Make a U-turn at Total Energies Petrol Station, Limuru Road. Drive back along Limuru Road and turn left onto City Park Road next to City Park Market.

Sunday Birdwatch

21st August. Sunday Bird Watch – Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary. Meet at 8:30 am at the Main Gate. (There's a Sanctuary fee of Ksh. 100 for citizens.) Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. After Jamhuri Sports Ground take the first left turn (**before** the Commonwealth Cemetery). It's 500m to the Sanctuary main gate.

If there are changes of venue, they will be posted on the website.

If you have questions, please write to news@naturekenya.org or phone 0780-149200.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma on Imbomati911@gmail.com or Phone 0721-649452.

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi
4th August - Moi Village and bridge. Meet 4 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office (Ksh.100 boda boda fare to and from the bridge).

11th August – Malindi Harbor. Meet at **9 am** at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office. NOTE: This is a morning walk!

Tree Walk
By Nature Kenya
Plants Committee
Venue: National Museums of Kenya
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate
Date: Friday 26th August Time: 9:00 AM
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

18th August – Malindi Harbor. Meet at **2.30 pm** at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

25th August - Malindi Airport. Meet at 3:30 pm at the Malindi Airport Gate (Bring a National ID card)

27th August. Saturday Bird Watch - Lake Jilore. Meet at 7:00 am at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office. The bird walk is likely to last for 3 hours. Bring drinking water.

For more information, email: malindimembers@naturekenya.org or Phone 0725-223042.

Mombasa Birdwalks are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540

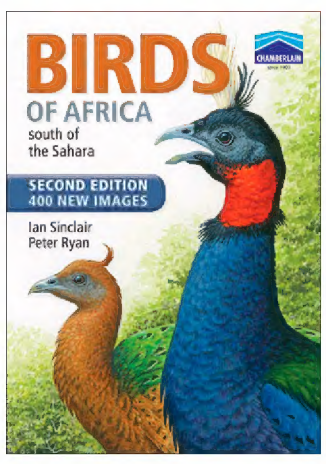
or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

Send your birding records to:
Kenya Bird Map <http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>
If you have questions re KBM, write to <kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

Stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new **Kenyabirdsnet** platform on Google Groups at:
https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet

After signing in you will be able to post your records at:
kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

Interesting books in store at the Nature Kenya Shop



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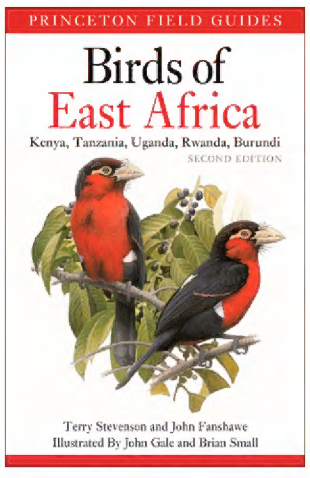

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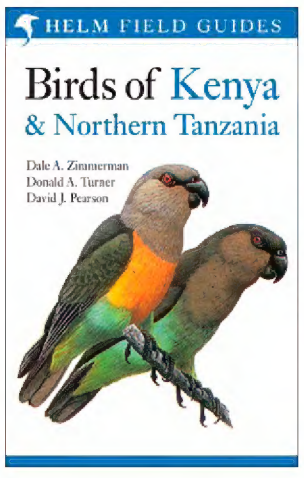

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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org